

Statement by the Third Party Verification Mechanism (TPVM) on the Current Situation in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kinshasa 28th March 2003

Throughout the month of March 2003, reports have been received of threatening troop presence and movements from different competing forces in the East of the DRC. This resulted in the intervention of the Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Republic of South Africa, in an attempt to defuse the situation from exploding into an open conflict, among the belligerent parties.

The Chairperson of the African Union, because of grave concern about the statements and numerous allegations and counter allegations emanating from senior officials of the governments of Republics of Rwanda and Uganda, on the security situation in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, instructed the Third Party Verification Mechanism (TPVM), to go and engage the various parties and verify their claims and report back to him as soon as possible. This, therefore, was the main task of the TPVM Fact Finding mission to Rwanda, Uganda and East DRC.

These statements from Uganda and Rwanda seem to suggest the existence of threats to their security in the East DRC and how to counter these.

This situation is further compounded by reports the TPVM has received of an eminent deployment of troops by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in response to these 'threats.'

This task was immediately undertaken by the TPVM and a preliminary report has been concluded for the attention of President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, in their capacity as Third Party Principals to the Pretoria Peace Accord.

The report covers a wide range of issues, and the work on some of them will continue, which includes inspections to sites the TPVM Verification Teams have not been able to secure permission to visit. In particular, the report seeks to answer the following questions:

1. If there was a threat posed by Uganda against Rwanda following the 6 March 2003 military intervention by Uganda (UPDF) to neutralise the threat to the pacification process of Ituri in Bunia?
2. Are there any Rwandan troops in the DRC in violation of the Lusaka and the Pretoria Agreement?
3. Whether Rwanda authorities ever trained, supported and supplied military weapons to the UPC to destabilise the Ituri region and attack Uganda?
4. Is Uganda supporting, training and arming ex-FAR/Interahamwe and the Mai-Mai in cohorts with the FAC against Rwanda?

5. Are the Ugandan troops being deployed beyond the Ituri region, and what is Uganda's interest beyond its borders and outside the Ituri region in particular?
6. Is there movement of troops and weapons plus supplies of military hardware to the South Kivus, particularly for the following Armed Groups – Masunzu, Madowa-dowa, Mai-Mai and ex-FAR/Interahamwe?
7. Is the DRC government deploying troops in the East? If so, what informs their decision to do so? Is this based on fact or fiction? Or are there other factors that must be taken into account, within the context of the Lusaka Agreement or any other existing agreement?

From the 15th to the 25th March 2003, the Third Party Verification Mechanism responded to the African Union's Chairperson's instructions and conducted a thorough investigation. The results of which have since been submitted to the Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Republic of South Africa.

Without pre-empting the actions of the Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Republic of South Africa, the Third Party Verification Mechanism would like to make the following observations and comments:

1. That there is a lot of aggressive military activity posing a direct threat to the Peace Process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo taking place in the following areas amongst others: Minembwe, Lulimba, Virunga National Park, Rutsuru, Bunyakiri, Walikale, Beni/Butembo/Lubero and Kanyabayonga/Bunyatenge;
2. That the Republic of Uganda adhere to the letter and spirit of the Lusaka Agreement and withdraw their troops from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and that under no circumstances should they be allowed to remain in the territory of the DRC in accordance with the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement disengagement plan.
3. The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is urged to observe and respect the letter and spirit of the Lusaka Agreement, and not allow itself to be provoked into deploying its troops in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
4. Agreement between the two sovereign states, Uganda and the DRC that ensures the withdrawal of Ugandan troops from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The TPVM calls on all parties involved in the DRC conflict, to find a way of expressing themselves, by using the peaceful platform created by the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, instead of using weapons of war to state their case.

It is important for all parties involved in the DRC peace process to note that, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a crucial stage of its life; where political players are supposed to be concluding a Peace Pact where all the players would

have a stake in the political life of the country; let all peace loving activists world-wide support this heroic and historical feat of the Congolese people.

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